



Testimony of Lorie McGee Brown
Director of External Relations (CT), Achievement First
Submitted to the Connecticut General Assembly Appropriations Committee
February 16, 2016

Good evening Chair Bye, Chair Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Lorie McGee Brown and I am the Director of External Relations for Connecticut at Achievement First. As a non-profit, high-performing network of charter schools that started in Connecticut, we serve over 3,800 students across 11 schools in Bridgeport, Hartford and New Haven.

I am here today, along with several Achievement First (AF) students, families and educators to urge the General Assembly to maintain Governor Malloy's and its own prior commitments to allow public charter students to continue at their current schools. For example, funding for grade growth allows 6th graders at Achievement First Summit Middle in Hartford to matriculate to the 7th grade next year, as long as the Governor's proposed allocation remains in the final version of the budget. We have collectively made promises to these students for them to be able to continue their education at their current schools, and it's critical that we keep our promises to these families.

However, the challenge with the budget proposal is that per-pupil funding for public charter schools remains flat at \$11,000 for the third consecutive year. Flat funding means that Achievement First schools will have to make extremely difficult and painful decisions, including the prospect of reducing additional instructional positions, offering fewer advanced and enrichment classes and limiting investments in other resources that are critical to students' learning experiences.

The \$11,000 in per-pupil funding that public charter school students receive in government funding is about \$4,000 less than traditional public school students receive in per-pupil funding from the government -- a gap that has, sadly, consistently widened over the years. Allowing public charter school students to continue to receive significantly less public funding for yet another school year is not just unfair, it is unjust and it is compromising the quality of their education.

First, it's unfair and unjust to public charter school students, the vast majority of whom come from some of Connecticut's most traditionally underserved communities. More than 73 percent of public charter schools students are defined as low-income (receive free or reduced price lunch) -- the same as their largely urban host district schools.

Second, it's unfair and unjust to families. This funding inequity penalizes parents who exercise their choice in selecting a public charter school that's best for their child. As a state, we should encourage more high-quality public school options for our families, rather than restrict funding based on the type of school a child attends or where they live.

It's unfair to teachers, principals and staff who are charged with the same responsibility of educating these students, but are forced to do so with fewer resources.



We certainly recognize the state's challenging fiscal situation, but at a minimum, the state should fairly and equitably distribute the resources it does have among ALL the public school students it serves.

Achievement First students have consistently demonstrated some of the strongest results in the state. On recent SBAC results, all Achievement First schools outperformed schools in their host districts, across all grades and subjects combined, by margins ranging from four to 41 percentage points. In fact, according to ConnCAN's analysis of the 2015 SBAC exam, every Achievement First charter -- Amistad Academy, Elm City College Prep, Achievement First Bridgeport Academy and Achievement First Hartford Academy -- scored among the top five districts in the state among critical subgroup populations, specifically low-income students, students of color and English Language Learners.

While we are proud of these results, we know we can and must do better. However, by continuing to shortchange public charter school students, the state puts this progress at grave risk.

In order to maintain and expand our students' progress, it's critical that the state treat all public school students fairly and equitably under the law. We urge you to pursue a long-term solution to fair and equitable funding for all students in our state. Achievement First students and all public charter school students deserve a new approach and desperately need a new funding solution.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony before this committee this evening. We are eager to partner and work with you to continue to strengthen our state's education system so that all its students are given the academic and character skills they need to succeed in college, career and life.

###